

Worksheet 7:

Top tips for communicating with a person with dementia

Human communication is very complex. Often we tend to focus on *verbal* communication (what we say, what we hear and understand), but we also use lots of *non-verbal* communication (body language, eye contact, hand and arm movements, distance from someone, tone of voice etc.).

People with dementia often have difficulty with the verbal part of communication but no problem with the non-verbal part.

Remember – **‘it’s not what you say, it’s the way that you say it!’**

People with dementia are all unique individuals so will have their own ways of communicating. However, there are some key tips which you can apply to help a person with dementia to communicate with you and understand you.

Slow down when communicating – slow down when you are talking and make hand or arm gestures slow and calm.

Speak clearly at an appropriate volume – don’t mumble, and you don’t need to shout at people with dementia. Look at the person when you are talking to them.

Use excellent non-verbal communication – smile, use eye contact, stand or sit at a comfortable distance to the person, make sure you are at the same level as they are.

Use non-threatening body language – don’t stand over the person with dementia as this can feel intimidating.

Write things down to aid understanding – have a notebook and pen handy. Write key words clearly and start each word with a capital letter e.g. Toilet, Bank, Changing Room, Telephone.

Use pictures to aid understanding – some people respond well to pictures. Draw if you are confident, or find useful pictures or signs you can point to.

Be aware of any sensory needs the person may have – they might have poor vision and/or hearing, so find out if they have glasses or a hearing aid.

Be conscious of the cognitive difficulties a person may have – this means that they may not remember what you have said so you may need to repeat yourself several times. The person may not understand what you are saying or might misunderstand you, so be very clear and use gestures and/or pictures to help.

Make sure the environment supports effective communication – noise, loud music, bright lights and lots of people around might be really distracting, so assist the person with dementia to a quieter place if possible.

Keep calm – take a few deep breaths if you need to, and try to be aware of your own communication – don’t ‘tut’ under your breath, and don’t turn your back on the person with dementia. Get help if needed.